

# Connecting the Past and the Future: Memory Institutions Facilitating Access to Information in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

*Memory institutions serve as the bridge spanning the gap of the past and the future through the preservation of intellectual and cultural heritage to sustain development and prevent memory loss. Access to information serves as a thread that connects communities, research and memory institutions. The future and success of national development goals are premised on access to information and hence the need to explore how technologies can be utilized to integrate libraries and related memory institutions to support digital inclusivity. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of developing countries like Zimbabwe in sustaining the digital infrastructure. The paper highlights the extent to which libraries can create digital platforms to interact with the digital public in the area of humanities. The paper also examines how academic library consortia are utilising technology to connect with the scholars and researchers. It explores the extent to which libraries can utilise Public and Private sector Partnerships (PPPs) with National Research and Education Networks (NRENS) and Internet Service Providers (ISP) to enhance the value of service delivery. It will also highlight the challenges and opportunities of promoting memory institutions for the benefit of research and education. This paper also brings out another dimension of the media as a critical platform that preserves and facilitates the access to information, arguing that the media is the first draft of history and as such useful bedrock that memory institutions might reliably rest upon. However, the paper is also cognisant of the possibility of the uses and abuses as well as manipulation of memory institutions as instruments of political expediency. This is so, especially in sceptical regimes who may view memory institutions as nothing other than appendages of power. Yet if truth be told, memory institutions are sacrosanct repositories which ought not to be tempered with.*

**Keywords:** Information Access, Media, Memory Institutions, Patriotic History, Sustainable Development

## 1. Introduction

Memory institutions belong to the realm of Information Sciences, which by nature is concerned with the processes, procedures and techniques involved in contemporary Information Storage,

Access and retrieval (Chisita and Malapela, 2016). Dempsey (2000) views libraries, museums and archives as “memory institutions” constituting “an important part of the civic fabric, woven into people’s working and imaginative lives and into the public identity of communities, cities and nations”. Byrne (2015. p. 259-269) states that memory institutions transmit experience and creativity across



the borders of time and space, language and custom, people and individuality. Abid (1998) views memory as the source of knowledge and memory of the peoples (nations) of the world, as special vehicles for preserving cultural identities and serve as key pillars in linking the past and present and in shaping the future.

Sharif, (2015) defined memory institutions as resources which came at a very early stage to include all institutions specialized in the conservation and arrangement of documents and objects to facilitate access to knowledge they contained. The author further views memory institutions as the main pillars of the nation's documentary heritage— "nation's memory". Such institutions encapsulate and reflect cultural identities viz a viz through connecting user to physical and intellectual heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage is in sync with United Nations Sustainable development Goals Number 11 and target 11.4 which strongly supports the protection of cultural heritage.

It is against the above contextual understanding that the paper seeks to define memory institutions, describe the functional role of memory institutions and analyse the legal framework for memory institutions in Zimbabwe and examine as well the state of memory institutions in Zimbabwe and explore the practicality of converging memory institutions vis –a viz the digital revolution. The paper also unpacks the role of media as a critical institution of memory, and argues that the media are the first draft of history and play a pivotal role in helping access memory institutions.

## **2. Memory Institutions – a Historical Overview**

Buckland (2011. p.1-7.) argues that the original and fundamental definitions of the memory institution

came from the information science discipline, where it was conceived as a symbol for libraries, archives, museums and clearinghouses, and intended to encourage a coherent view of the information resources they provide. There has been a growing interest in memory, especially in developed countries or continents like Europe, as academicians attempted to negotiate, interpret, link or connect Europe's past through sites, texts, and artifacts of remembrance (Huysen, 1995; Terdiman 1993; and Kansteiner 2002). Fine and Beim (2007) views memory as a commodity that can be stored, retrieved, and forgotten and hence the need to archive. Memory institutions extend from personal archives and local museums and libraries. However, in 2013, Buckland broadened the definition of memory institutions to encompass technology and he recommended the use of the term memory infrastructure. This maximised definition goes beyond the institutions since it encompasses everything, for example, the expertise, technology, space, networks, strategies, processes and procedures and users. Technology is critical because without it, the preservation component would be impossible (Buckland, 2013p.12-14). Galleries, libraries, archives and museums have the basic functionality of accumulation and preservation of information, mostly concerning the past (Robinson 2012). Accessing and preservation of the physical remains of human cultural and biological heritage is essential for an informed society (Clark et al 2002). Scholars have defined GLAM institutions as 'memory institutions' (Cathro 2001; Dempsey 2000; Dupont 2007; Enser 2001; Gomez 2010; Hedstrom and King 2004; Miller 2000; Tanackovic and Badurina 2009; Tibbo and Lee 2010), and, knowledge organisations (Given and McTavish 2010; Macnaught 2008).

GLAM institutions collect the memory of peoples, institutions, communities, the scientific and cultural heritage and products throughout time, contributing to prosperity by joining us to our ancestors and are our legacy to the future generations, Dempsey (2000).

### 3. Zimbabwe's Memory Institutions' Infrastructure

Zimbabwe has a thriving memory institutions infrastructure and a system encompassing libraries, museums, galleries and archives as well as research institutions. These institutions are located within the major cities or towns. There are various legal frameworks which guide the operations of these institutions, with regard to administration, legal deposit, censorship and public access to information and privacy. The enactment of the National Library and Document Services Act (NLDS) in 1985 helped to bring issues about library development on the government's priority list. It also strengthened the legal basis for library development. This stage also raised the expectations of many people as they felt that library development was now destined for greater heights. The free mobile public library service and the establishment of the Murehwa Culture House raised the impetus of public libraries just like other memory, galleries in Zimbabwe have experienced two historical epochs namely Colonialism and Independence. According to the National Galleries Act of Zimbabwe Chapter 25:09 the gallery is responsible for

- ❖ Maintaining, developing and managing all art galleries of established
- ❖ those vested in the Gallery;
- ❖ Encouraging public interest, generally in the fine and applied arts;

- ❖ Promoting the interests generally of art in Zimbabwe;
- ❖ Preserving works of art which are acquired by or lent to it, or otherwise in its custody;
- ❖ Holding public exhibitions of works of art in such place or places within or outside Zimbabwe as the Board thinks fit and to charge such fees for admission thereto as the Board thinks fit.

Library development in Zimbabwe dates back to the colonial era when the colonialists established subscription libraries in the major towns of Harare, Mutare, Bulawayo and Masvingo in the 1890's. In Harare, the Harare City Library was established through an Act of Parliament known as the **Queen Victoria Memorial Library Act of 1902** which was later changed after independence into the Harare City Library through the promulgation of the **Harare City Library Act of 1982**. This Act did not state who would be responsible for funding for the Harare City Library even though it was receiving grants from the government, which were stopped during the year 1995 and it had to rely on subscriptions, fines and donations from philanthropic well wishers. Chisita and Chinyemba (2015.p47-53) state that in Zimbabwe legal deposit is provided for through the National Archives Act 22/2001 and Broadcasting Services Act (2001) with regards to multimedia formats. This legal framework is critical in connecting the nation to the past and present through facilitating access to physical and intellectual heritage. The National Archives Act 22/2001 Section 3 specifies the role of the National Archives in storing and preserving public archives and public records. The legal deposit requirement is complemented by the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) Section 41(b) which obliges broadcasting

licensees to deposit copies of their productions to the national archives at no cost (Chisita and Chinyemba, 2015 p.47-53). The authors highlight major challenge relating to the enforcement of legal instruments to oblige content producers to comply with the law to build accessible memory..

Jules (2003) posits that it is quite a challenge for cultural institutions to rely on goodwill (uberima fath) to ensure the comprehensiveness of deposit collections and this justifies the need for adequate mechanisms to facilitate compliance and enforcement. Lariviere (2003) further states that there is a need to educate stakeholders on how the legal deposit act operates and benefits that accrue from compliance, for example, increased visibility, wider publicity of publications, effective bibliographic control and long term guarantee of availability of original copies in the event that disaster strikes. As such, memory institutions should proactively educate their key stakeholders about the advantages of compliance to the strengthening of the collective conscience of the nation. Compliance also ensures the longevity of physical and digital cultural memory which serves as a bulwark against cultural haemorrhage. Matangira (2003:44) argues that even though progress has been registered in the management of paper records and artifacts, many regions of Southern Africa still need to build capacity in the area of managing audio and sound archives.

Rooks (2010) notes that in the United Kingdom archival recordings dating back to the 1940s reveal a very clear sense of the historical importance of sound recordings, heightened in wartime, and the deeply held desire to ensure that people in the future would be helped to understand the life and times of their ancestors through sounds and voices. Similarly,

Zimbabwe's history is reflected in the Chimurenga files and other sound and audiovisual archives that should be preserved for the future of the nation. It is interesting to note that while nations pride themselves in creating and maintaining a historical record of sound audio archives, there is no matching interest in the preservation of such cultural heritage for posterity. Moyo (2002) noted that there is a strong correlation between access and preservation, since the two cannot be divorced from each other. The author views preservation as the holistic scheme that treats not only the indicators of damage, but goes further to correct the fundamental causes. However, preservation should also include the strategies to preserve technologies used to preserve sound and audiovisual archives.

When viewed from the perspectives of the politics and economics of information, archives, should not be viewed as neutral 'infospheres' but rather as both actor and subject and controversial and contested entities. The concept of neutrality has been viewed as a questionable and fallacious understatement of what memory institutions, including libraries should stand for (Lewis, 2008p.1-4). The author argues that even physicists, anthropologists and other researchers from other disciplines question the practicality of neutrality." To hide behind the idea of "neutrality" in such instances is to be a party to promulgating misinformation or worse" (Lewis, 2008. p. 1-4). Rosenzweig (2008.p.5-7) argues that impartiality and neutrality in librarianship are intertwined with the historical process of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation championed by new librarians. Furthermore, Rosenzweig (2008. p. 6) argues that the concern for democracy and epistemic justice is a byproduct of political processes rather than "... a

hewing to imaginary first principles of neutrality’ The author argues that the controversy surrounding archives and other memory institutions has to do with the politics of ownership of history and memory politics (Pickover, 2014. p. 1-18). Memory institutions become controversial because of the effect of power politics viz-a- viz the capriciousness of history.

It is a fact that memory institutions are by nature artificial creations and constructions and reconstructions reflecting the power matrix within a given space and time. This implies that the user’s epistemic experience will be determined by those who have selected, organised and designed the system for storage and retrievability of information. Rosenzweig (2008.p.6) cites incidences whereby memory institutions have been victims of censorship by the aristocracy, for example, during the first imperialist war 1914-1919 memory institutions were manipulated by commerce and politics to propagate the doctrine of jingoism resulting in the involvement of big powers in World War One. Other examples include the censorship of scholarship during the struggle for independence in Africa and Latin America and Asia.

Zimbabwe has not been spared by these political dynamics. There has been a deliberate and a systemic attempt to morph and intertwine memory institutions with the national political discourses of the day. Dominating the memory discourses in Zimbabwe is an ideological combat, partly powered by and partly reflected in the ideas. As noted by Ranger (2004) “Everyone engaged in any sort of education process in Zimbabwe is under pressure to teach what has recently come to be called Mugabeism.” And at the core of Mugabeism is a

version of the past called patriotic history which has since portrayed citizens in binary characterisation of patriots and sell- outs. As such, the liberation struggle mantra of ‘you are either with us and therefore a patriot’ or you are against us and thus a traitor’ has systematically been used in the political discourses of the post millennium – a critical turning point in Zimbabwe’s history whose ruling ZANU PF was for the first time in the history of its formation facing genuine hegemonic challenges threatening its perpetual stay in power.

From the above insights, the feasibility of the librarian, archivist and curator expertise being abused to influence collection, development, ownership and sharing, organisation and access of information to reflect the interest of a given group of people becomes very probable. As such, at the core of the archive and archival activity is the debate about who owns history. It is not only within the realm of fiction that the Archive and archivists are centrally placed in key moments of metamorphosis and transition and in the struggle for freedom and justice, all of which are full of intrigue, manoeuvring and the disclosure of secrets.

#### 4. Unearthing the Digital Divide

The Digital Divide is described as the gap between those who can access and benefit from ICTs and those who cannot (**Russell, and Steele, 2013.p1**). The authors attribute the lacunae to a lack of access to the resources themselves due to insufficient information infrastructure and services, or the financial means to acquire the hardware or software and the knowledge and skills critical for one to participate in the information age (**Russell, and Steele, 2013.p1**). Ondiege, Moyo and Chouchane (2013.p.62-69) argue that Africa has a pronounced

infrastructure deficit when compared to other countries in the developing regions.. The authors state that the continent has a deficit of infrastructure, particularly in energy and transportation. They further argue that the potential for information and communication technologies (ICTs) has not been fully harnessed. Development of an adequate-quality ICT infrastructure network will enhance productivity, reduce communication costs, and promote financial inclusion and regional integration (Ondiege, Moyo and Chouchane, 2013.p.62-69).

Pickover (2014) cites Harris (2002.p.63-64) who examined and highlighted how the apartheid regime administered memory institutions and heritage endeavours were subjugated to support the apartheid system's racial narrative through the state's control of memory at the expense of the marginalised black majority. The author argues that such examples illustrate how politics and politicians can abuse memory to cover up for the actions. Nora (1989.p.13) notes how the shift in the location of memory has led to the gradual disappearance of primitive or sacred memory in the wake of historical consciousness. He writes, 'modern memory is above all archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image' (1989: 13), and proposes 'there are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory' (1989: 7). According to Hjerpe (1994), memory institutions included libraries, archives, museums, heritage (monuments and sites) institutions, and aquaria and arboreta, zoological and botanical gardens". After a thorough analysis of different type's archival material, the author described memory institutions as institutions responsible for storing textual documents. Generally,

the human mind should be viewed as the original and most biological knowledge and storage device that has helped to sustain the collective memory of society since time immemorial (Atkinson, and Shiffirin, 1976). Memory and existence are intertwined entities because there is no existence without memory or vice versa. This has been buttressed by Lemony Snicket (2006) who notes that "Those unable to catalogue the past are doomed to repeat it." Memory institutions collect, describe and preserve content that enable us to interrogate reality.

Frodeman (2010:8) posits that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a transition from Kantian disciplinary to interdisciplinary or integrative knowledge production and problem solving. The interdisciplinary leit-motif justifies the closeness of librarianship and archival sciences and related disciplines, for example, computer science, cognitive science and communication. Rowley (2004:5) describes libraries, archives and related institutions as information organisations characterised by a social arrangement for achieving controlled performance in "pursuit of collective goals relating to information provision, sharing and management". The author further states that such organisations impact on society in learning, communication, health, economy, governance and social stability.

## **5. Thematising Memory**

Dupont (2007. p.13) argues that libraries, archives and museums can be grouped conceptually around the theme of memory because they all exist to 'make a better future by helping us remember and understand the past'. Trant (2009 p.369) acknowledges the pervasive nature of the concept of memory institution "The memory institution . . .

has captured the imagination of policy-makers as a powerful metaphor for the social role of libraries, archives and museums”‘. . . the lie has been passed into history and became truth. ‘Who controls the past’, ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting.’ (George **Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four**, Penguin, p. 31).

Dick (2011) posits collaborative knowledge creation using digital tools and documents. For my purposes, ‘extending convergence’ is about improving cross-sectoral (libraries, archives, museums) collaboration and cross-disciplinary knowledge creation. The author further states that collaborative knowledge production encompasses production in cultural memory institutions. Dick (2011) further argues that the extension of divergence when applied to post-apartheid South Africa meant the expansion of the uses and users of cultural heritage.

### **5.1 Uniqueness of the Characteristics of Memory Institutions**

Libraries, archives and museums have been separated from each other because of the uniqueness of the characteristics of their collections in terms of materials, physical form, nature of associated knowledge and users. Cathro (2001); Dempsey (2000; and Gomez (2010) concur that arguments for convergence of libraries, museums and archives are commonly accompanied by a conventional wisdom that brings them under the blanket definition of ‘memory institutions’. Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt, (2008) state that memory institutions in their bricks-and-mortar form reflect quite different traditions of documentation

and organization, even though they share, common goal, with regard to the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage .

Featherstone (2006) views that the classification and storage typical of archival work is more flexible than the ordering methods employed by libraries. The author further distinguishes between the alignment of large quantities of documents in record series from the tem-level description and indexing of library items. This validates the view that archives holdings are determined by the principles of provenance unlike libraries that store collective memory in a concrete, pre-existing form. The lack of theoretical development within the converging information disciplines has also been highlighted as an issue of great concern (Myburgh, 2011). Chiparoushe and Chisita (2015) view the digital dispensation as an opportune time for libraries to realise their full potential by venturing into strategic partnership with regard to production and licensing of e-content. The authors argue that while libraries are acquiring e-resources through negotiating license agreements with publishers, memory institutions can use strategic partnerships to build capacity in empowering library content managers with knowledge and skills in negotiating licenses. The partnership between memory institutions and media organisations is critical in the development of digital content. De Laurentis (2006.p77-89) argue that the modern world requires memory institutions to change from traditional institutions concerned with static collections into innovative and progressive entities driven by innovative use of ICTs for digitisation, archiving and presentation, novel user services and working on new business models. The author recommends memory institutions to adopt new business models rather than being fixated on

providing free access and this is a great challenge for developing countries whereby ordinary citizens cannot afford to pay for information.

Duff, Carter, Cherry, MacNeil, and Howarth, (2013) argue that the aspect of collaboration and convergence of memory institutions and related affiliated of library and information science, archival studies, and museum studies, have been the subject of prolonged discussions in the literature of the three disciplines for the past several decades (Tanackovic and Badurina 2009). However, with the dawn of the new millennium deliberations on the possibility of convergence and collaboration have been strengthened by the drive towards interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations in scholarship. There are numerous reasons that spur the need for collaboration, namely, growing needs of users, the need to widen access to cultural heritage, the desire to engage users, the proliferation of ICTs and dwindling budgets and new trends in knowledge generation and dissemination among other factors. The concept of collaboration and convergence of memory institutions revolves around access, interoperability, content production and administrative facets. Rant (2009. p376) and Ray (2009. p.357) highlight the critical role of conventional and non-conventional education including continuous professional development as critical factors driving the agenda towards a converged community of professional practice uniting libraries, archives, museums and galleries.

Enkenberg et al.(2002) describes content production. “the creation – for traditional and electronic media – of documentary, cultural, educational services; entertainment and marketing

or communication-related programmes, and related business activities.” It necessitates co-operation with cultural industries, software and hardware producers, publishers, tele-operators, and TV broadcasting companies, incorporating activities such as tourism, financing and commerce.” “As long as librarians, archivists, and museologists continue to be educated in isolation from one another, real boundaries to collection, management, and access of materials will remain” (Given & McTavish,2010).

Partnerships between memory institutions and National Research and Education Networks (NRENS) are critical in enabling reliable access to electronic content to support education and research. Chisita and Rusero (2016) advocated for enhanced collaboration between NRENS and memory institutions (libraries) to develop infrastructure to enable effective and reliable internet access and inter-institutional connectivity. Furthermore, Darch (2000.p33) and Zeleza (1996) doubted the possibilities of African libraries benefiting from affordable internet services because of the commoditisation of internet service by commercial internet service providers (ISPs) and dearth appropriate content reflecting the scholarly views of people from third world countries. Gramsci (1978) highlighted the pressing need to direct collective attention towards the present as a basis for its radical transformation .

## **5.2 The Nexus of the Media and Memory Institutions**

The media is a critical platform that both stores and records information which in essence is the first attempt to tap memory. As has already been articulated, the media is the first draft of history. Any attempt of storing, retrieving, coding and



decoding information within various media platforms is inherently an attempt at coding and decoding memory. Curran (1996) argues that the media should generate plurality of understandings and enable individuals to interpret their social experience and relate this to alternative conceptions of society and human nature and question the assumptions and ideas of dominant culture as well as enable everyone, on the basis of diverse perspectives and sources to decide for themselves how best to safeguard and advance their welfare in collective as well as individual terms and weigh this in the balance in relation to alternative definitions of the wider public interest.

Media can also work as an agency of representation by enabling diverse social groups and organizations to express alternative viewpoints. Such expressions will then be stored and restored for futuristic purpose and in essence will become memory, occupying a critical space in the memory institutions' data base. As such the media should go beyond simply disseminating diverse opinion in public domain. It should function as a way of invigorating memory of a given society. The media should assist in the collective representational role which should include helping to promote conditions in which societal memory is adequately stored and restored for alternative productive uses.

Whilst this is the case, as the paper has already eluded to much of media activities especially those falling under authoritarian regimes have devastating implications on memory. This has been postulated by McQuail (2005) in his theories of the press projection. One of the postulations of the theories of the press is the authoritarian theory which is the oldest of the press theories. It is an idea that placed

all forms of communication under the control of a governing elite or authorities. The emphasis here is on subordinating the media to totalitarian state control as authorities justified their control as a means to protect and preserve a divinely ordained social order. At a minimum, the press is expected to avoid any criticisms of government officials and to do nothing to challenge the established order. In this case the media may not criticize the government or it simply exercises neutrality in affairs to do with government or ruling class. The media have a role in nation building, propaganda/spin as a government mouthpiece. There is punishment or censorship for deviating from set guidelines.

The authoritarian government may go to the extent of punishing anyone who questions state ideology. According to Singh (2011), the fundamental assumption of the authoritarian system is that the government is infallible. There is no journalistic independence and these are subordinated to the state by force or design. Also foreign media are subordinate to the established authority, in that all imported media products are controlled by the state. The instruments of authoritarian control include repressive legislation, direct control of production by state, enforceable codes of conduct, taxation, other economic sanctions, government appointment of editors and suspension of publication. Under such circumstances the role of the media as a purveyor of authentic intangible memory heritage is largely constrained and hence highly unauthentic.

## 6. Conclusion

The authors conclude that memory institutions indeed serve as the bridge connecting the past and the future. Memory institutions remain the pinnacle that preserve intellectual and cultural heritage to

sustain development and prevent memory loss. As such, access to information serves as a thread that connects communities, research and memory institutions. The paper also brings in an equally important dimension of the media as the first draft of history and thus a conduit of memory preservation, access and perpetual relay. However, given a possible attempt on the uses and abuses of media by those who wield power, if not handled appropriately, the media is likely to churn out distorted regime propaganda that is not only irrelevant but a menace to the memory institutions in as much as embracing the intangible heritage of memory is concerned. That being the case, a viable use of media remains critical in preserving and accessing memory especially in the post digital era, for the umpteenth time.

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